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Subordinate questions in Swedish by 12- and 15-year-old Finnish immersion students

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Abstract

The present study explores how 12- and 15-year-old immersion students (n=75 and n=73) produce subordinate questions in Swedish on a written test. Previous studies are sparse, but they report difficulties with both subject-verb word order and use of the subjunctor om and the subject marker som occurring in these clauses; informants with varying ages and competence levels struggle with similar problems. However, the acquisition order between these two types of constructions, a central theme in this study, has gained less attention. Analyses of the actual data show significant differences with varying effect sizes in accuracy between the different subcategories of subordinate questions and both informant groups. Insertion of grammatical words was mastered by significantly fewer informants than word order. Also, effect sizes were large in these contexts. Older informants do better than the younger ones, but the differences are not always statistically significant, as certain constructions are already mastered at a high level by the younger informants, whereas other constructions are still difficult for the older ones.

Keywords: immersion, Swedish as an L2, indirect questions, complexity, usage-based grammar

1. INTRODUCTION

Immersion is a second language (L2) teaching programme with excellent results (Bergroth 2015, Lyster 2007), but it requires further development (Lyster 2007). Canadian and Irish studies (Harley 1993, 1998; Ó Duibhir 2009) have revealed problems with grammatical accuracy. Finnish immersion research has been manifold (Bergroth/Björklund 2013), but the development of grammatical competence has gained minor attention.

This article explores how Finnish-speaking pupils in early total immersion (henceforth *immersion*) master subordinate questions, i.e. a subcategory of subordinate clauses, in a written test at the end of primary school (at age 12) and at the end of secondary school and immersion[1] (at age 15) and what kinds of difficulties they have with these constructions. The data consist of a written test. Subordinate questions play a central part in polite language (Lahtinen/Toropainen 2015); hence, it is important to be able to use them.

Factors behind difficulties in second language acquisition (SLA) can be feature-related (properties of a linguistic construction), context-related (different learning conditions), and learner-related (individual characteristics; Housen/Simoens 2016). This study focuses on learner-related factors in the form of a comparison between younger and older informants. It also offers information about which aspects of subordinate questions are the most difficult (i.e. feature-related difficulty) and, hence, which must be the precise focus of more explicit instruction. It is well founded for grammar instruction to focus on moderately difficult and difficult constructions because the learners benefit the most from doing so (DeKeyser 2003). It is likewise important to explore which constructions are most difficult by analysing language produced by L2 speakers instead of analysing only the grammatical descriptions of a language: what seems to be difficult for a linguist describing a language does not need to be difficult for an L2 speaker (Hammarberg 2008) and vice versa. It is also important to study immersion pupils separately from other L2 speakers of Swedish as this especially intensive, input-rich and long-lasting learning programme combines both communication and a focus on form that distinguishes it from many of the other methods.

The direct questions usually follow the V2-rule in Swedish, i.e. they have subject-verb inversion (henceforth *inversion*). Swedish subordinate questions, on the other hand, typically have a canonical subject-verb word order (henceforth *word order*)[2]. Thus, transforming a direct question into a subordinate one typically implies that the inverted word order of the direct question must be cancelled, i.e. straightened (Teleman et al. 1999a). Both direct and subordinate questions can be divided into two categories in Swedish: those beginning with an interrogative word (henceforth *vx-questions* when the interrogative word is not the subject, e.g. *Jag vet <u>vad du menar</u>*, and *vs-questions* when the interrogative word is the subject or part of it, e.g. *Jag vet <u>vad som har hänt</u>*) and those lacking that interrogative word (henceforth *yes/no questions*) (Teleman et al. 1999b.) In addition to the cancelled inversion, the subordinate yes/no questions begin with the subordinator *om*, whereas vs-questions include the subject marker *som* in the subordinate clause (Holmes/Hinchcliffe 1994, Hammarberg/Viberg 1979).

2. USAGE-BASED GRAMMAR AND ASPECTS OF DIFFICULTY

Children acquire their first language (L1) by memorising concrete utterances (constructs) that combine both form and meaning. In time, they discover regularities in these constructs and start varying them, ultimately discovering the abstract constructions behind them. The constructions

[1] There are no immersion upper secondary schools in Finland (Bergroth 2015).

[2] In spoken Swedish, inversion can also occur, especially in subordinate questions (Teleman et al. 1999b). This variation is, nevertheless, stylistic, not evidence of language change (Källström 2000).

become increasingly complex and schematised over time as the learners abstract on how the parts link together and build relationships between them, which permits the production of brand new utterances (Nistov et al. 2018). Thus, grammar is an implicit, cognitive organisation of a learner's actual language experience, and it develops when new constructions are added to the inventory (Bybee 2008). In this article, I define both word order for subordinate questions and for the grammatical words *om* and *som* as constructions.

SLA in immersion begins early on and takes place mostly as a spontaneous process when the learner focuses on meaning. Therefore, it is appropriate to draw parallels between L1 and L2 acquisition, although the SLA of immersion pupils is already impacted by their L1, directing whether they notice constructs in the input (N. Ellis/Wullf 2015). One's L1 can hamper SLA if the L1 lacks, e.g. grammatical morphemes occurring in the L2 (Collins et al. 2009), especially at the earlier stages of the acquisition (Bybee 2008). Finnish subordinate questions have, e.g. the same word order as direct questions[3] (Hakulinen et al. 2004), and they lack equivalents for *om/som*. Hence, Finnish-speaking L2 learners of Swedish may experience difficulties noticing these words in the input as they tend to ignore them as redundant. Learners are also likely to transfer elements from other L2s they have mastered when the distance between the L1 and the target language is greater than between the target language and another L2 (De Angelis 2007). Since the informants in this study also learn English at school, their acquisition of Swedish is likely affected. Subordinate vx- and yes/no questions in Swedish and English are actually very similar to one another: The word order is canonical in both languages, and the Swedish subjunctor *om* equals the English subjunctor *if*. The subject marker *som*, on the other hand, is a morpheme without an English equivalent.

Many constructions of an L2, though, cannot be learned without explicit instruction (N. Ellis/Wulff 2015). It is easier to learn frequent traits, and repetition makes memory representations more accessible. Extremely frequent sequences can be acquired as wholes as if they were independent of a general pattern, and consequently, they can help the learner analyse similar but less frequent forms. However, high-frequency elements tend to become phonologically reduced, i.e. difficult to notice in the input, i.e. their salience is low (Bybee 2008). This explains why several highly frequent grammatical morphemes in an L2 are difficult to acquire implicitly: One cannot acquire what one has not noticed (Goldschneider/DeKeyser 2001).

Subordinate questions are rare in both spoken (Jörgensen 1978) and written Swedish (Hultman/Westman 1977). Especially rare are vs-questions, as only a few interrogative words can act as a subject in a sentence, e.g. *vem* ('who'), *vad* ('what') and *vilken* ('which'). Moreover, these interrogative words can also act as other sentence constituents when the subject marker *som* should not be used (e.g. *Jag frågade vem du såg*, 'I asked whom you saw.').

According to DeKeyser (2005), a grammatical construction can be difficult to learn for three reasons. Firstly, meaning is difficult if it is abstract or novel for languages previously acquired by the learner. Both *om* and *som* have abstract meanings; they only signal the fact that a clause is subordinate. The subordinator *om*, however, has an equivalent in English, so it might be easier than the subject marker *som*, which does not. Omission of *om* also leads to an obscure utterance (**Jag vet inte han kommer*), much like if the subordinator *if* were omitted in English (**I don't know he is coming*).

Secondly, the source of the difficulty might lie in the form, especially if it is complex, i.e. the learner is obliged to make many decisions concerning, e.g. different allomorphs (DeKeyser 2005). Choices of allomorphs are not applicable to subordinate questions, but the clauses in which

[3] E.g. *Tuleeko hän huomenna?* 'Is he coming tomorrow?'; *En tiedä, tuleeko hän huomenna*, 'I don't know if he comes tomorrow'; *Mitä hän tekee?* 'What is he doing?'; *En tiedä, mitä hän tekee*, 'I don't know what he's doing.'

the insertion of *om/som* is obligatory can be considered more complex than vx-questions: they include two constructions inside each other, and hence, one must be able to use both the right word order and the right grammatical word.

Thirdly, difficulty may stem from the relationship between form and meaning. These can both be easy per se, but the link between them might still be problematic to grasp (DeKeyser 2005). In subordinate questions, the problem is opacity, where different constructions stand for the same meaning. Direct questions usually have an inverted word order, whereas subordinate questions follow a canonical word order, but both types are questions. This might be especially perplexing for Finnish learners, as direct and subordinate questions have the same word order in their L1. To use inverted and canonical word order in accurate contexts, they should also manage the distinction between main and subordinate clauses, but this is often difficult (Rahkonen/ Håkansson 2008).

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Philipsson's (2007) doctoral dissertation is the most comprehensive study on subordinate questions in L2 Swedish so far. The acquisition order in written production by the most advanced informants was yes/no<vx<vs. The difficulty of vs-questions, according to Philipsson, was caused by the omission of *som*, not by an inaccurate word order.

Nyqvist (2020) has previously analysed the actual data at the individual level (see section 4.2 below) with 12- and 15-year old Finnish-speaking immersion students and a control group of 16-year-old formal learners of L2 Swedish as informants. As this analysis dealt with the word order and the use of *om/som* separately, it led to an acquisition order of vs<vx<yes/no, which differs from the one found by Philipsson (2007) but still supports his perception: the word order is not the main problem in the vs-questions. Nyqvist's (2020) results also showed that the formal learners reached a higher level of accuracy in the word order than the immersion groups. Inversion in subordinate questions was also documented by Hyltenstam/Lindberg (1983) and Viberg (1990).

Only 53% of Rahkonen's/Håkansson's (2008) informants, who were Finnish-speaking formal learners (17–18-year-old high school students that had received explicit instruction) of L2 Swedish, mastered canonical word order in subordinate questions (the type of subordinate question not specified), whereas 95% mastered inversion in direct questions. This was in line with the order presented in Processability Theory, but Rahkonen/Håkansson also emphasised the low frequency of the subordinate questions and the difficulty in distinguishing subordinate and direct questions (cf. Philipsson 2007) from one another as factors explaining the order. The fact that the reporting clauses preceding the subordinate questions were often direct questions (e.g. *Vet du när han kommer?* 'Do you know when he comes?') might have also played a part.

Problems with L2 learners' use of *som* by were noted by Philipsson (2007), Viberg (1990) and Nyqvist (2020). Philipsson (2007), however, did not explore the equivalent phenomenon with *om* in yes/no questions, and even Viberg (1990) only stated that *om* was sometimes omitted, whereas Nyqvist (2020) showed that the use of *om* is problematic for the younger immersion students, whereas the older immersion students and the control group reached a high accuracy at the individual level.

4. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. INFORMANT GROUPS

The informants in this study make up two immersion groups (the same individuals as in Nyqvist (2020)): the first consists of 12-year-old Finnish-speaking 6th graders (n=75, henceforth IM6) and the second group of 15-year-old Finnish-speaking 9th graders (n=73, henceforth IM9)[4].

[4] Statistical power 0.8 and 0.9, respectively (Larson-Hall 2016).

The informants started learning Swedish at daycare at 4–5 years of age (for the average starting ages for immersion in Finland, see Bergroth 2007), so they have been learning Swedish for 8–9 years (IM6) and 11–12 years (IM9), respectively.

The proportion of instruction given in Swedish varies in different grades. Immersion pupils receive 50% of their instruction in Swedish in the comprehensive school. The actual proportion is 50% in the 6th grade and 45% in the 9th grade (Bergroth/Björklund 2013). The standards set for competence in the immersion language are essentially higher than in the non-immersion context: students have to reach B-level on the CEFR scale in order to reach the level of 'good' at the end of immersion (i.e. in the 9th grade; Bergroth 2015). The informants have also been learning English since the age of nine, and they live in continuous contact with it; hence, their L2 Swedish might bear certain traits of their L3 English (FNBE 2014).

4.2. DATA AND ANALYSIS

The data consist of a written test during which the informants received help with vocabulary but not with grammar. The test was part of an extensive package of grammatical tests the informants wrote during one of their regular Swedish lessons. This package could not be too long, so the part focusing on the subordinate questions is relatively short. There are 12 direct questions that the informants transformed into subordinate ones, e.g. *Hur kallt är det? → Jag vet inte hur kallt det är* ('*How cold is it outside?*' → '*I don't know how cold it is outside.*'). Vx-, vs- and yes/no questions have four obligatory occasions on the test. There are 900 subordinate clauses in IM6 and 876 in IM9. One disadvantage of using a grammar test as data is that it does not deal with practical communicative competence, which is essential in immersion. Due to the low frequency of subordinate questions, however, the only way to obtain enough obligatory occasions for all studied constructions is to use elicited data. The actual test also involves written production, i.e. it is not a multiple-choice test where an informant would have a 50% chance to answer correctly.

The data are analysed at the group level. Accuracy scores for the different types are calculated as a whole and separately from the perspective of word order and of the insertion of *om/som*. The subordinate question (*Jag undrar*) *om *var maten god* ('*I wonder if *did the food taste good*'), for example, is inaccurate as far as word order is concerned, whereas the use of the subjunctor *om* is accurate. The subordinate question (*Jag undrar*) **maten var god* ('*I wonder *the food tasted good*'), in contrast, has the accurate word order, but the subjunctor *om* has been omitted. However, all these clauses are classified as inaccurate when the overall accuracy has been calculated. Accuracy scores are calculated by dividing the number of accurate obligatory occasions by the total number of obligatory occasions: e.g. in IM9, 260 of the 292 vs-questions have an accurate word order. Hence, the accuracy score is 89%. Acquisition sequences were established in line with the principle wherein an acquisition sequence delivers an acquisition order; a high accuracy implies early acquisition and, consequently, an easy construction (Collins et al. 2009). Pearson's χ^2 (value of p <0.05) will be used as a statistic test as it does not require Gaussian distribution. As statistical significance sometimes occurs solely because of a high number of informants (Sullivan/Feinn 2012), the effect sizes of results have also been calculated (Cramér's V; V <0.5 large, V=.3–0.5 medium, V <0.3 small when df=1[5]; Cohen 1988:79–80)[3]. The central research questions are:

1. Which type of subordinate question is easiest/most difficult?
2. Are *om/som* markers more difficult than word order?

[5] df=1 in all cases in this study.

5. RESULTS

In this section, I present quantitative data. Table 1 presents the accuracy scores, among which there are no differences between the inaccuracies in word order and in the use of *om*/*som*.

Group	vx		yes/no		vs	
	accurate/all	%	accurate/all	%	accurate/all	%
IM6	148/300	49%	42/300	14%	0/300	0%
IM9	210/292	72%	194/292	66%	36/292	12%

Tab. 1 *Overall accuracy scores for the different types of subordinate questions in the two informant groups*

Overall accuracy scores in both groups are highest in the vx-questions and lowest in the vs-questions (as in Philipsson 2007). The accuracy score of vs-questions in IM6 (0%) is significantly lower than that of the two other subcategories in both groups (p <.001 in both cases). The effect sizes are large in both groups when vs-questions are compared to vx-questions (V=.572 in IM6; V=.603 in IM9). In IM9, the effect size is likewise large when compared to yes/no questions (V=.554), in which IM9 reaches an accuracy score that is 54 percentage points higher than in IM6.

Vx-questions are also mastered at a significantly higher level than yes/no questions in IM6 with a medium effect size (p <.001, V=.405), which also underlines the group's low overall accuracy score for yes/no questions. The accuracy scores of IM6 are lower than those of IM9 (p <.001 in all cases), but the effect size is large solely in yes/no questions (V=.535; V=.231 in vx-questions and V=.258 in vs-questions). Table 2 presents the accuracy scores for word order.

Group	vs		vx		yes/no	
	accurate/all	%	accurate/all	%	accurate/all	%
IM6	280/300	93%	148/300	49%	67/300	22%
IM9	260/292	89%	210/292	74%	194/292	66%

Tab. 2 *Accurate word order in subordinate clauses in the two informant groups*

When the results are explored from the word order's point of view, both informant groups reach the highest accuracy score in vs-questions and the lowest in yes/no questions; i.e. the acquisition order differs from that in Philipsson (2007) but is similar to that in the analysis of the same data at the individual level (Nyqvist 2020). It is not surprising that vs-questions have the highest accuracy scores, as the word order is also canonical in the corresponding direct question. The accuracy score, however, is not 100% in either group: a minority of informants in both groups has inverted the word order in vain.

Accuracy is significantly higher for vs-questions than for both vx-questions and yes/no questions in IM6 (p <.001 in all cases); effect size is large when vs- and yes/no questions are compared (V=.719) and medium when vs- and vx-questions are compared (V=.487). Also in IM9, the word order is significantly higher in vs-questions than in both vx-questions and yes/no questions (p <.001 in both cases), but with small effect sizes (V=.216 and V=.272). Consequently, differences between the different types of subordinate questions are less substantial than in IM6.

IM9 reaches significantly higher accuracy scores than IM6 in vx- and yes/no questions (p <.001 in both). A medium effect size is noted only in yes/no questions (V=.444), in which the accuracy score in IM9 is as much as 44 percentage points higher than in IM6, whereas vx-questions manifest only a small effect size (V=.231). In vs-questions, the difference between IM6 and IM9 is almost significant (p=.065), but with a very small effect size (V=.076).

Five of the reporting clauses are direct questions, and seven are declarative clauses. The type of reporting clause has a nonsignificant impact with very small effect sizes on the accuracy of the word order in both groups (p=.0812 and V=.008 in IM6; p=.373 and V=.03 in IM9). Thus, there is no evidence of any kind for interrogative reporting clauses leading to increased failure to use the accurate word order (cf. Rahkonen/Håkansson 2008). Table 3 summarises the accuracy scores from the point of view of the use of *om*/*som* in the different informant groups.

Group	*om*		*som*	
	accurate/all	%	accurate/all	%
IM6	42/300	14%	0/300	0%
IM9	195/292	67%	42/292	14%

Tab. 3 *Accurate use of om/som in the two informant groups*

The omission of *som* in both groups is significantly more common than that of *om* (p <.001 in both). The effect size is large in IM9 (V=.534) and close to medium (V=.274) in IM6, where the omission of *om* is also common. Accuracy scores for both grammatical words are significantly higher in IM9 (p <.001 in both cases), but the effect size is large merely in the case of *om* (V=.592); in *som*, only a small effect size is observed (V=.28) as accurate contexts for it are still rare in IM9.

When accuracy scores for the insertion of *om/som* and word order are compared, one can see that using *som* in both informant groups is significantly more difficult with large effect sizes than the word order in the questions in which it occurs (i.e. vs-questions, p <.001 in both groups; V=.935 in IM6; V=.747 in IM9). This confirms the fact that the use of *som* is problematic for both informant groups. The insertion of *om* is significantly more difficult than word order only in IM6 (p=.008), and the effect size is small (V=.108), as the use of *om* is less problematic than *som* for them.

An essential difference between *om* and *som* is the fact that the omission of *om* co-occurs with inaccuracies in word order in both groups: no fewer than 90% of the subordinate yes/no questions with an inaccurate word order also lack *om* in IM6. In IM9, the equivalent proportion is 99%. In subordinate vs-questions, only 7% of questions in IM6 and 10% in IM9 have both an inaccurate word order and omission of *som*, i.e. the percentages are significantly lower than those for the co-occurrence for *om* + inaccurate word order with very large effect sizes (p <.001 in both groups; V=.821 in IM6; V=.844 in IM9). Essentially, omission of the subordinator *om* and an inaccurate word order in yes/no questions are closely intertwined.

Besides the omission of *om/som*, there are instances of overusing another particle, the subordinating conjunction *att* (the primary meaning of which is 'that', as in '*I think that he is right*.'). This occurs in both IM6 and IM9 (43 and 50 instances, respectively) and in all types of subordinate questions. The phenomenon is explainable by the L1 of the informants: nowadays, *että* (the Finnish equivalent for *att*) is commonly used as a linking word between a reporting clause and the reported speech, including subordinate questions especially in spoken Finnish but also in informal written language (Korhonen 2009). According to Teleman et al. (1999b), the conjunction *att* in reported speech also occurs in informal Swedish, but their examples do not include subordinate questions, which implies that the construction [*att* + subordinate question] is unlikely and might confuse L1 speakers of Swedish.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the extent to which subordinate questions are mastered at the group level by Finnish-speaking 12- and 15-year-old immersion students who had completed a test where they were expected to transform direct questions into indirect ones. Subordinate questions

are low-frequency constructions (Jörgensen 1978, Hultman/Westman 1977), and they include so many formal characteristics that they are typologically difficult to acquire (Källström 2000). However, they play a part in communication as a politeness strategy (Lahtinen/Toropainen 2015), making them important to master.

Results from the analyses in both informant groups are parallel to those obtained in the analysis of the same data at the individual level (Nyqvist 2020). They reveal that subordinate clauses basically involve two different learning tasks: use of the canonical word order typical of Swedish subordinate clauses and the use of *om/som* occurring in yes/no and vs-questions, respectively. The previous research (e.g. Philipsson 2007, Rahkonen/Håkansson 2008), however, has mainly focused on word order. The word order of subordinate clauses is indeed a notorious source of difficulty for L2 learners (e.g. Hyltenstam 1992), but it is likely to be especially difficult in subordinate questions due to opacity (cf. DeKeyser 2005), i.e. direct and subordinate questions have basically the same meaning, but they typically have different word orders. It can be especially difficult for Finnish-speaking learners, whose L1 has the same word order in both types of questions (Hakulinen et al. 2004). Immersion students are often seen as privileged L2 learners because they receive rich input with plenty of occasions for meaningful communication, but they still appear to need instruction in word order, although they have reached a higher level than, e.g. Rahkonen/Håkanssons's (2008) informants.

When accuracy scores at the group level are examined without distinguishing between inaccuracies in word order and the use of *om/som*, vx-questions have a higher accuracy score than both yes/no and vs-questions in both informant groups; i.e. the acquisition order is identical to the one presented by Philipsson (2007), who also stated that the low accuracy of vs-questions was not caused by the word order but by the subject marker *som*. This also explains the acquisition sequence in the actual study. Vx-questions lack contexts for *om/som*, i.e. they are less complex (cf. DeKeyser 2005) than other types of subordinate questions. Moreover, they are likely to be a rather frequent type of subordinate question in the input received by the informants.

When the focus shifts to word order, however, both groups master vs-questions at a higher level than vx- and yes/no questions (as in Nyqvist 2020). This is because the informants do not have to cancel inversion in these, as the equivalent direct question also manifests the canonical word order. However, it is important to note that the word order in vs-questions is not mastered at 100%. An analysis of reporting clauses also revealed that their forms, i.e. whether they are declarative or interrogative, do not impact the accuracy of the word order, although Rahkonen/Håkansson (2008) speculated about their role.

Yes/no questions are the most difficult type of subordinate question in both groups when the analysis focuses on word order, and similar results have been documented in an analysis at the individual level (Nyqvist 2020); my results differ essentially from Philipsson's (2007). This might be because Philipsson's informants living in Sweden have received even more input than my informants. The use of inverted word order is widespread especially in IM6, and the omission of *om* and inverted word order co-occur in both informant groups. Regardless of how the accuracy is calculated, one can conclude that the different types of subordinate questions have different levels of difficulty, although they have the word order. The fact that yes/no questions have the lowest accuracy when focusing on word order might be because the subjunctor *om* adds to the complexity of the clause type (cf. DeKeyser 2005) in a way that also impacts their mastery of the word order.

In short, answering whether accurate word order is easier for the informants than the accurate use of *om/som* is 'yes' for both groups. However, there are differences between these words. The insertion of the subject marker *som* is especially problematic; its accuracy score is 0% in IM6 and 14% in IM9, whereas 11% of informants master it (cf. Nyqvist 2020). In other words, it is a very difficult construction: *som* is a short grammatical word with an abstract meaning and low salience. It is also low frequency, it lacks equivalents in other languages commonly known

by the informants and co-occurs with only a few interrogative words (those that act as a subject in the subordinate clause), and it adds to the clauses' complexity. Hence, the word is difficult where both meaning and form are concerned (cf. DeKeyser 2005; see also N. Ellis/Wulff 2015). Besides the inaccurate use of *om*/*som*, the ungrammatical use of *att* also occurs in subordinate questions.

IM6 also masters the subjunctor *om* essentially at a lower level than IM9. The aspects of difficulty concerning *som* are also applicable to *om*, but *om* has a direct equivalent in English (*if*), and its omission makes the utterance difficult to understand, which might explain why the older informants master it at a higher level than *som*. It is possible that the similarity between Swedish and English and the omission's dramatic effect on its comprehensibility increase the salience of *om*. Similar results were found at the individual level in both immersion groups and in the group receiving formal instruction (Nyqvist 2020). The insertion of *som* is, likewise, more difficult than the use of canonical word order in both informant groups. A similar phenomenon can be detected in yes/no questions in IM6, whereas accuracy scores for the word order in yes/no questions and for the insertion of *om* are at approximately the same level in IM9, i.e. the older informants reach better learning results, contrary to *som*.

Hence, one can assume that feature-related factors such as frequency, salience and complexity (Housen/Simoens 2016) play a crucial role in the acquisition of subordinate questions. A comparison between IM6 and IM9 showed that IM9 mastered the studied constructions to a greater extent than IM6 in all cases except for word order in vs-questions, which are mastered at a non-significantly higher level in IM6. Effect sizes for the differences are medium to large only for word order in yes/no questions and in the use of *om*. Thus, learner-rated difficulty (Housen/ Simoens 2016) appears most visible in these constructions; in others, the informants already reach a rather high level in IM6, whereas others are very difficult even for IM9.

In some cases, inaccuracies in subordinate questions indeed put comprehensibility in danger, but they also label the speaker as an L2 speaker; therefore, there is a reason to focus on them in second language instruction. In short, my informants have not yet completely mastered word order in subordinate questions, but other problematic constructions are the low-frequency, insalient grammatical words *om* and *som*.

It is therefore important to increase salience and noticing (see Bybee 2008) of subordinate questions during Swedish lessons. Their low frequency can be resolved by providing the learners with skewed input in which subordinate questions have several occurrences, as high frequency strengthens memory representations (Goldberg/Casenhiser 2008, DeKeyser 2005). DeKeyser (2005) also recommends conscious analyses of input as part of instruction, as grammatical constructions might otherwise be at risk of being disregarded by L2 learners. Even Swedish researchers (Håkansson et al. 2019, Prentice et al. 2016) have proposed an increased focus on pattern recognition as an effective method of L2 instruction. A deliberate analysis of subordinate clause examples can create aides-memoire, which can be utilised by the learners when analysing other examples of the same construction (Bybee 2008, N. Ellis/Wulff 2015).

Accurate use of the formally complex subordinate questions should also be practised intensively. Interleaving, i.e. practising multiple skills in an irregular order in the same exercise, leads to better results than blocking in the long run; focusing on one construction at a time is beneficial, as interleaving leads to deeper processing and also resembles actual language use (Nakata/Suzuki 2019). As Swedish has three different types of subordinate questions with the same word order but different accuracy scores, and as two of the types also include difficult grammatical words, it is possible to create interleaving exercises with subordinate questions.

Enhancing grammar acquisition, however, ought to be a collective task for all teachers of immersion students in Swedish, not only for their language teachers. According to the counterbalanced approach (Lyster 2007), teachers in subjects other than languages should also be able to shift the focus from their own subject to linguistic questions when needed (e.g. when a student

faces a problem related to the language) or when it otherwise feels natural. The students' attention can be drawn to the language, e.g. with help from different fonts, by the teacher stressing certain grammatical morphemes, or by explicit comments that, in these cases, need not include advanced grammatical terminology ('Did you notice the word *som* in this subordinate question?'). Thus, utterances occurring in, e.g. history compendia can also generate formulaic sequences acting as aides-memoires outside the lessons. When the rich input and meaningful communication typical of immersion are combined with effective instruction, there is a good chance that learners will reach a high level of competence.

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